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THE PHYSICAL SPENCER. II

By Dr. JAMES FREDERICK ROGERS

NEW HAVEN, CONN.

NOTING his intense self-concern, Comte advised Spencer to marry, believing that sympathetic companionship would have a curative effect. Professor Huxley also advised the same treatment, humorously referring to it as "gyneopathy." Appearances gave the impression that he was in fair health. "Appetite and digestion were both good; and my bodily strength seemingly not less than it had been, as tested by walking, was equal to that of most men who lead town lives. This continued to be my state for many years."

"During my consultation with him, Dr. Ransom advised me never in future to live alone. He thought, and no doubt rightly thought, that my solitary days in lodgings had been largely instrumental in bringing on the physiological disaster which had already cost me so much of life and of work, and was thereafter to cost me far more. Probably he inferred that in the absence of distractions my brain had been active during times which were nominally times of rest; and he doubtless recognized the truth that besides this positive mischief, there had been the negative mischief which lack of society and its enlivenments entails."

Congenially settled, he found himself able to write "at the rate of about a closely written page of post-paper per day, which takes me from two to three hours, and though it usually congests my head more or less before I have got half through, I do not find that I permanently suffer."

"How did I pass my leisure hours? In those days I was not a member of a club; and now that I have been for many years habituated to one, I am at a loss to understand what I did in the latter part of the day. Then, as always after my nervous breakdown, reading, even of the lightest kind, told upon my brain just as much as working. So far as I can remember, a walk into town, half-an-hour at a public news-room, and a walk back served to fill part of the afternoon; and the rest was spent in such miscellaneous ways of killing time as might offer themselves."

"The improvement in health achieved during the season in London, was increased in Scotland by the fresh air, exercise, fishing, and—I was going to say—quiet. But I am arrested by the remembrance that to nervous subjects country places often prove the reverse of quiet. The early chirping of sparrows, and, still worse, the clucking and crowing of fowls, are dreadful inflictions to them. I have often entertained sanguinary feelings towards a vociferous cock, which, after I had passed the first part of the night in tossing from side to side, began crowing just as I was beginning to get a little sleep, and kept me awake during the ensuing hours. At Beoch a droll incident was associated with this experience. My bedroom faced the farm-yard, and to get sufficient air in a small room I had to keep the window partially open. The result was that the early crowing of the cock was a great torment to me. To remedy the evil, the good people shut up the cock in a barn on the opposite side of the yard. But as the bottom of the barn door was worn away and the pavement hollow, the space sufficed both for the light of the dawn to advertise the cock that it was time to begin crowing, and to allow the sound to be heard almost as clearly as before. The device they then hit upon, which proved quite effectual, was to place him under an inverted bucket, and there keep him until I was getting up. It was amusing to observe how, when released, he endeavored to make up for lost time by crowing with immense energy and rapidity."

Writing of his forty-third year, he says, "This season seems to have had no relapse from my ordinary abnormal state of health. Sleeping, now as ever a chief difficulty, had been improved by a course recommended; as witness the following paragraphs.

"I have recently been profiting considerably by the advice of a French physician—a Dr. de Mussy to whom Huxley sent me. He has prescribed frequent warm baths—three or more times in the week, with the view of improving my sleeping. I have decidedly slept the better for them.

"Here let me add, for the instruction of the sleepless, that some years later Mr. de Mussy told me he had modified his opinion respecting the efficacy of warm baths as soporifics; for he had met with cases in which, though taken at a temperature below blood heat (as they should always be), they produced wakefulness instead of sleepiness. That under some conditions they do this, I can myself testify; for, many years after, owing I suppose to some change in my constitutional

state, this reverse effect was produced upon me, so that I dare not take a warm bath late in the day. Unexpected as this experience was, it was congruous with a statement once made to me by the late Dr. Bence Jones respecting other medicinal agents. Speaking of drugs, he said that there is scarcely one which may not under different conditions produce opposite effects. Certainly we have familiar proof that this is the case with alcohol, tea, coffee, tobacco and opium.

"This mention of opium reminds me that I had for some time previously made occasional use of it—commonly under the form of morphia. With me sleep brought sleep and wakefulness was habitually followed by more wakefulness; so that after a series of specially bad nights it had been my practice to break the morbid habit, and re-establish the periodicity of sleep by artificial means. Sometimes it was weeks, sometimes months, before I again had recourse to one or other preparation of opium. That the average result was beneficial is an opinion which I here express, because there is, I think, an undue fear of opium; both in the minds of medical men and in those of men at large. Every medicinal agent is liable to abuse; and when it has been greatly abused there arises a reaction, which goes almost to the extent of forbidding its use. In respect of opium a reaction is needed."

Four years later he attempted to increase his hours of work. "It resulted that beyond my morning's work, continued, when I was well, from 10 till 1, during which interval Mr. Duncan acted as amanuensis, some work of so light a kind that it hardly seemed worthy the name, now filled an hour or two at the end of the day. Though reading had the same effect on me as dictating, and though half an hour over a book in the evening made my ordinarily bad night decidedly worse, yet I hoped that I might listen when read to without suffering from it. It was a foolish hope. Many experiences might have shown me that the effect would be mischievous.

"My nervous affection had been from the beginning of such a nature that disturbance of the cerebral circulation was caused by whatever necessitated persistent mental action, no matter of what kind. Often when at a loss how to pass the time, I have been asked—'Why do you not read a novel?' But the effect of reading a novel is just the same as that of reading a grave book. When at my worst, half a column of a newspaper as surely brings on head-symptoms as do two or three pages of metaphysica. Whatever involves continued attention produces the effect. Dr. Ransom, who had suffered from a similar affec-

tion, told me that he brought on a relapse by too persistently watching, through the microscope, the early changes in the fertilised ova of fishes; and he further told me that disorders akin to his own and to mine, were common in Nottingham among the lace menders—a class of women who, all day long, have the attention strained in looking for, and rectifying, small flaws which have been left by the lace-making machines. Hence I might have known that continuous attention to a reader would have nearly the same result as continuous reading. This presently proved to be the case. My restless nights were very soon made more restless. Without thinking what I was doing I nevertheless persevered; and by and by found I had brought about one of my serious relapses.

“I have nothing to remind me of the date, but I imagine that this disaster occurred early in December (1867).

“In a previous chapter I named the fact that I had recourse to morphia when my nights became much worse than usual; and doubtless on this occasion I sought thus to bring on again the periodicity of sleep, which, once broken through for some time, had to be re-established by artificial means.

“And here it occurs to me to describe, for the benefit of those who have not experienced them, some of the effects of morphia on dreams. In me it gives extreme coherence to the ideas evolved. Unlike the actions and events of an ordinary dream, which are linked on by accidental suggestions in such wise that they form a rambling series, the actions and events of a morphia-dream are almost like those of the waking state, in their rationality and orderly connexion. For a long time the thoughts which arise bear a logical relation to some primary thought, and the actions performed continue to be in pursuance of some original intention. Occasionally this trait was so striking that I next morning recorded the dream illustrating it.”

To restore his “constitutional equilibrium” he spent five weeks in Italy. An incident of this journey which he relates furnishes ample evidence that, aside from its mental functioning, his bodily machine was capable of great and healthy activity.

A few days after his sixtieth birthday he writes, “My vigour is pretty well shown by the fact that I find myself running upstairs two steps at a time, as I commonly do.”

From now on his days were spent, one or two hours in reading and dictating, and the rest in walking, riding, fishing, and in killing time otherwise in the best way to avoid mental

activity. There were ups and downs. At sixty-five, after walking about half a mile, wielding a salmon-rod for a quarter of an hour, and walking home again, he was obliged to spend several days in bed and "there was thus made a further descent to confirmed ill-health and incapacity."

After a change of scene and of company, he was, in three years, able to return to London, "frequented the Athenæum daily for a month, and even got so far as playing a game of billiards. Then, as usual, came a catastrophe; too long and too animated a conversation brought me down with a crack, and I was unable to reach the Athenæum during the remainder of the season."

In the "Reflections" of his Autobiography, written in his seventy-third year, he in a masterly way and thoroughly Spencerian style points out that both the quality and quantity of mental activity depend on the working of the bodily machinery. "It becomes clear" he says after this review, "that mind is as deep as the viscera." He goes on to analyze his own behavior and to account for its quality and quantity as compared with that of his parents on physiological grounds. "One apparent reason" why he had "never shown the unfailing diligence common to them is that the cerebral circulation has, by bodily traits, been throughout life rendered less vigorous than it should be." "It is true that my extraordinary feat in walking when a boy of 13, seems to prove that there was at that time no deficiency in either heart-power or lung-power; and, if we pass over the evidence from thoracic development it might be inferred that the damage done by the enormous over-tax on a half-finished body, was the primary cause of this defective function throughout after life. Certainly it seems likely to have been a part cause. Be this as it may, however, there is undeniable evidence that, either from deficient propulsive power or from some chronic constriction of the arterioles, the remoter plexuses of blood vessels everywhere have commonly not been duly charged. Hence a somewhat deficient genesis of energy, or at any rate, a genesis of energy not as great as that displayed by my father."

Speaking of his life work, he says: "Men at large have to pass their days in duties from which they would gladly be excused. Quite different has been my lot; my chief complaint having been that state of brain every day forbade me to continue when I wished to do so. Even taking into account chronic disturbance of health, I have every reason to be satisfied with that which fate has awarded me."

"Moreover these disturbances of health have not been of a kind so difficult to bear as those borne by many who have no compensations for them. They have not entailed on me any positive suffering; unless, indeed, the weariness and irritation of perpetual bad nights come under that name. I have not been subject to much positive pain; less, I think, than most are. And then, during the greater part of the time since my break-down in 1855, the constitutional state, which seems to have become adapted to a small amount of broken sleep, has not been such as to negative many of the pleasures within reach. It is true that, reading to any considerable extent being injurious, light literature has been almost wholly cut off, and restriction of evening excitements has been imperative; but otherwise, up to the age of 62, the deprivations were not great. Only during the last ten years, and especially during the last six years, have I been more and more cut off from most relaxations.

"And here let me exclude some misapprehensions likely to be caused by what has been said above. Naturally it will be inferred that the chronic perturbations of health described, and especially those which of late years have brought me to what may be called an invalid life, must be indicated by an invalid appearance. This is far from being the case. Neither in the lines of the face nor in its colour, is there any such sign of constitutional derangement as would be expected. Contrary-wise, I am usually supposed to be about ten years younger than I am. And this anomalous peculiarity conforms to a medical observation which I have seen made, that nervous subjects are generally older than they look."

A living and intimate picture of Spencer is that given by "Two,"—the ladies who served as his housekeepers for eight years—from the completion of his autobiography in 1889 to 1897, when the philosopher had reached the age of seventy-seven.

"At twenty minutes to five he drove rapidly to the door in his carriage—a shabby little victoria—and, stepping quickly out, slowly ascended the steps, leaving the innumerable rugs, cloaks, etc., he had brought with him to follow.

"He shook hands cordially, and then entering the dining room sank in silence into an arm-chair. The silence lasted several seconds, after which he informed us that he had been feeling his pulse! Luckily it had been beating regularly, and conversation, to use the hackneyed phrase, 'became general.'

"But our surprises were not all over. He had, with careful forethought and attention to detail, ordered his supper a week beforehand. It was to consist of eggs, toast, and cocoatina, a simple repast which hardly needed so much warning and preparation. But now, at the last minute, he suggested a grilled whiting, 'only it must *be* a whiting, you know; half the time the fishmongers send a haddock instead.'

"At this prompt and unexpected exhibition of masculine nature our spirits rose. 'Come,' we thought, 'this is more homelike. Philosopher or no no philosopher, at least we feel that we have a man in the house.'"

"He used to return from the club at about nine in the evening, and sit with us for about an hour, and if the conversation proved too trying for him he would produce his ear-stoppers and shut himself off from the world of sound. These ear-stoppers were formed of a band almost semicircular in shape, with a little velvet covered knob at either end, which was pressed by the spring in the band on the flaps over the hole of each ear. Very practical and sensible, no doubt, but irresistibly funny to see, and a ready butt for parody.

"Each evening at ten o'clock punctually he rose, wished us 'good-night,' and went to his room. His oddities extended even to his sleeping arrangements, and as he insisted on his bed being made in a certain fashion of his own, he retired the first evening after his arrival at an earlier hour than was his custom subsequently in order to see that the bed had been prepared for him after the approved plan.

"This was as follows. A hard bolster was placed under the mattress, raising thereby a hump on which the small of his back rested. The clothes had a pleat in them right down the centre, so that they were never strained, but fell in loose folds on either side of him, an arrangement which, though we were assured it was most comfortable and restful, certainly looked peculiarly untidy."

One evening "He went off into a discourse on the subject of dress and on the folly of clothing an exposed part, such as the foot, more lightly than the rest of the body, and held forth in his most serious and emphatic style for several minutes on this important topic!

"It was all done in the most natural way, as if socks were a suitable and interesting subject of conversation in any kind of society.

"On thinking of it now, one is inclined to laugh, but there was no thought of that then, not even when, on his companion

saying she suffered from cold feet, he offered with eagerness to give her some small pairs of his own to wear over her stockings if she didn't mind appearances."

"Hearing by chance that one of us had washed her hair in a fireless room, he promptly sent an order to her to proceed to the study to receive a 'good bullying' from him for being so unwise. The lecture was borne meekly, and so his ascendancy over us in these matters was established. He next heard that the delinquent always made a poor breakfast; and using the advantage he had gained, he sternly remarked that he must rule her with a rod of iron, and in future should not inquire 'Good morning. Have you used Pears' soap?'—and here he twinkled and gave a little chuckle—but 'Good morning. Have you made a good breakfast? For eating too little is simply a habit which should be broken as soon as possible, for it is an extremely injurious one.'"

When riding, "he would often pull up his carriage with a stentorian shout of 'stop!' to the coachman, no matter where he might be, whether in a quiet place or in the middle of the business traffic in Regent Street. The carriage was at once brought to a standstill, and silence reigned therein for some few seconds. This, we soon learnt, was in order that he might feel his pulse. If it was regular the drive was continued, if not, and he feared injurious consequences, the order was given to return home."

"It was one of his most striking characteristics that when well he was able totally to ignore the dark cloud of illness, which, always hovering, so constantly descended upon him.

"His energies never flagged when his strength did not desert him, and when he was drawn into public controversies he still showed the vigour of a man in his prime."

"We could always tell when one of his bad bouts commenced, for on those occasions he used to adopt a curious garment he had devised to protect himself from cold with as little exertion in dressing as possible. It was made of a warm, woolly material, and compounded in such a way that he had only to step into it and with one pull was fully clad in boots, trousers, and coat. We used to call this the 'woolly bear'—a name he adopted for it—and when we heard from the housemaid he was clothed in it, it was a warning to us that there was a trying day to be faced. The trouble that caused these bouts lay wholly beyond the power of himself or any member of the household to prevent.

"Public controversies gave him many a sleepless night. Ill-informed newspaper paragraphs upset him more than formerly. Any anxiety too, such as delay in the arrival of his MS., caused remorseless insomnia, and many a weary hour did he pass in bed unable to sleep when he made his attack on Lord Salisbury. He was determined to 'smash' him for his excursions into science, and for this he had to suffer, for he could not get the matter out of his head night or day, and finally he was completely prostrated, and a bad bout of illness followed.

"No words can adequately describe the black pall of depression which then appeared to descend upon Avenue Road. Its dreariness affected every member of the household, and forced the spirits into the lowest depths. One typical November day, when the gloom of the impenetrable fog outside was only equaled by the dreary gloom which prevailed within, M. as usual was sitting in the poor old invalid's bedroom, simply that he might feel the comfort of a human presence near him, for he was too ill for conversation.

"He lay buried in his pillows, and gave no sign of life except an occasional long drawn sigh—almost a groan—which accompanied the rising and falling of his hand, and that spoke far more eloquently than words could have done of the state of hopelessness into which he had sunk. For it was one of his worst days, when his ill-health completely mastered him, and although only of a temporary nature, it was terribly trying for him and very distressing for us.

"Hour after hour crawled by. Darker and darker grew the room as the fog slowly descended like a thick veil before the window.

"Complete silence reigned within. From without could be heard occasionally the far-off scream of the London and North Western Railway whistles, as the trains rushed with a dull roar into the tunnel near Chalk Farm Station.

"At length a belated but prosperous bluebottle, as if in protest at the unusual silence in the room, flew noisily across the prostrate figure in the bed. Its buzzing fussiness was almost startling, breaking so suddenly upon the deathlike stillness, and this led M., who was sitting by the fire, to glance across at it and cry, "You ought to be dead!"

"'Wh-what! *What* did you say?' came in a feebly surprised tone from the pillows, and something very like a weak laugh followed.

"‘I said that that vociferous bluebottle ought to be dead; and so it ought at this time of the year,’ she replied.

"‘I saw no bluebottle,’ he went on, and the tone of his voice showed signs of increasing amusement as he continued, But you suddenly looked straight at me and emphatically cried, ‘You ought to be dead!’

"Having made that quite long speech, he broke into low, irresistible laughter! And what a welcome, welcome sound it was, for there could not have been a better sign that he was beginning to mend. It was so, and before the day was over M. ventured, with success—for she was not checked—to tell him of an amusing little incident which she had shortly before experienced.

"She had ever since wanted to tell him, but had not dared embark upon so long a story until that weak laugh gave her, as it were, permission."

It was not until his eighty-second year that it became evident that Spencer was going to pieces both physically and mentally.

In this year Spencer wrote an appendix to his autobiography entitled "Physical Traits and Some Sequences" in which he reviews in detail his physical history.

"Until the time of my nervous breakdown, I had good health. My constitution appears to have been not strong in the sense of possessing overflowing vigour, but strong in the sense of having a good balance. All through life, in late days as in early days, my state of body and mind has been equable. There have never been any bursts of high spirits and times of depression; but there has ever been a flow of energy moderate in amount, but sufficient for the purposes of life.

"One consequence has been that I have preserved down to late life a love of amusements of all kinds. I never fell into that state of indifference which characterizes many. Concerts and theatres continued to be attractions until my broken health forbade attending them; a good drama being to the last, as at first, one of the greatest pleasures which life yields. Certain sports too, as salmon and sea-trout fishing, retained their attraction until my strength failed. To friends who have lost liking for other pursuits than work, I have often insisted that it is a mistake, even from a business point of view, to give up amusements; since, when disturbance of health has made a holiday imperative, there remains no means of passing the time with satisfaction. ‘Be a boy as long as you can,’ was the

maxim which I reiterated. Games, too, I played as long as physical powers allowed. Above all I continued to enjoy the country; my sojourn in which every summer was looked forward to as the great gratification of the year. How fully I entered into its concomitant pleasures may be judged from the fact that I went picnicking when over eighty.

"Being moderate in amount, my flow of energy was never such as prompted needless activities. There are men whose fulness of life necessitates some kind of action—purposeless action, if no other. This was never so with me. Contrariwise, I tended always to be an idler. Action resulted only under the prompting of a much-desired end, and even then it was with some reluctance that I worked at things needful for achieving the end. . . .

"One of the traits of a constitution which, though not vigorous, was organically good, appears to have been a well-finished development of the structures which arise out of the dermal system. I was thirty-two before I had any sign of decay of teeth. I never had a tooth taken out or stopped. Of the eyes, which are also dermal structures, the like may be said. They have all through life remained strong. Down even to my present age (eighty-two) I read without spectacles; sometimes putting on a pair, but finding the inconvenience such that, on the whole, I prefer to do without them. I may add that I have, until quite recently, rejoiced in a strong light. That dislike to a glare which many people betray, even in their early years, I have rarely if ever felt. The like holds with the ears. Those around me say that my hearing is perfect. Is there any significance in this perfection and long endurance of teeth, eyes, and ears, all of them developed from the dermal layer? The implication seems to be that in the process of development there was no failure of nutrition at the periphery.

"During these later years, when capable of any work, my dictation (according to Mr. Troughton) has amounted sometimes to two periods of ten minutes each during the morning, and sometimes to three. Reading for more than a few minutes at a time is mischievous, and listening to reading has to be restricted to fragments. It has been so even with music. Even so simple a thing as looking at illuminations in monthly magazines is too much for me unless taken in portions. Sometimes things have considerably improved, as at Septon, in 1900, when I could walk about the garden a little; while at other times, as in the spring of 1901 and again during the present autumn (1902) I have been mainly confined to bed, even the

extra effort entailed by reclining on a sofa being too much. To all appearances this state of things will become more pronounced, and infirmities of other kinds, which have during these last years added to my troubles, will make such part of my life as remains still more to be dreaded."

But "feeble and emaciated as his frame now was, he had lost little of that strength of will which had always been a marked trait with him, and both nurses and doctors found him by no means an easy patient to deal with. No less emphatic was the assertion of scepticism in regard to the treatment ordered by the doctor . . . he wanted to know the reason for this, that, and the other mode of treatment recommended."

Save for the attacks of aphasia in 1902 and in the next year, there were no marked symptoms. He continued his correspondence and his interest in public affairs into his eighty-third and last year.

Spencer at no time had the appearance of a confirmed invalid. He was proud of his small hands and in his seventy-eighth year had a plaster cast made of them. He was also somewhat vain of his teeth, but, as Hugh Elliot remarks, it would have been better for him had they been filled. It was foreign to his method of thought to have one extracted, since it would have involved "a subtraction from his own personality."

The trend of events in Spencer's physical history run interestingly parallel to those of his father, even to the extravagant outlay of energy in the long walks of their childhood. His long invalidism was very evidently due to a hereditary weakness in the mental machinery—perhaps an inbred tendency not improved by the fact that the family had for at least two past generations been devoted exclusively to mental pursuits, including the nerveracking business of teaching. Neither his father nor his grandfather did more "day by day, than wield the pen or the pencil, and neither of them was given to sports of any kind."

If one were in search of illustration of the connection between mental activity and physiological processes, and their linking in emotional disturbances, he can find convincing proof in Spencer's daily history. The unconscious working of the mental processes is also finely exemplified, for his work flowed from his pen without need for alteration, until something went wrong with the machinery, the disturbances impressed themselves on consciousness, the "secretion" of thought became painful, and vegetation was the enforced order for the remainder of the twenty-four hours.

If one must have a name for his disease, undoubtedly "neurasthenia" would, in our present state of knowledge, be most fitting, and more fitting than in most cases in which it is applied. There was some nerve weakness, but how or why is beyond our present gross knowledge of pathology. Whatever the lesion, we can be thankful that it did not interfere more with the development of the philosopher's great work, and that it was a stimulus to the production of his essay on "Physical Education."